

# WE DON'T NEED NO CHANGE MANAGEMENT

Arup R. Raha  
Infosys Technologies Ltd.  
Bangalore, India

## Abstract

Pink Floyd sang "*We don't need no education*" many years ago - it had created quite an uproar. Today in another uproar, many customers are singing "*We don't need no Change Management*". There is no grammatical error though! What they really mean is "*We don't need '**No Change Management**'*". Modern non-practical theories on Change Management, certification-driven Quality Processes and a maze of Change Management related guidelines, templates, forms and checklists have made Project Managers often fall into the trap of **Change Denial** and customers perceive it as **Change Aversion**. This was not the intent of "Change Management". Good project management is not about identifying a "Change", analyzing the impact on cost and schedule **and then refusing it!** Good project management is about the ability to foresee possible changes faster than others; it is about using the skills required for controlling the impact and maximizing the benefits of a change and above all having the **willingness to change**. Getting everything right the first time is the best thing one can expect but the next best thing to do is to change at the right time. The very reason we have work on our hands is because our customers want to make a change and it is a pity that very often project managers tend to use the concept of "Change Management" to resist change.

This paper will take a fresh view at the concepts of Change Management and suggest ways of **changing** the mindset of Project Management towards **Change!**

## Introduction

Things change. People change, climate changes, technology changes, fashion changes, regimes change, champions change, leadership changes. Everything changes with time. On a more philosophical note, even times are changing! Do we really need to manage change, something that is so common in our work and lives? A situation without any change probably does not need any management. Knowingly or unknowingly we are always trying to manage change, trying to control change – this is Change Management.

Organizations and business enterprises are also constantly subjected to change and there is no doubt that changes in the context of business can often become very complex. Today, Change Management is a well-known, well-researched and well-read subject. Most organizations have well-documented Change Management processes. They believe they know exactly how to deal with every change. This is more evident in the Information Technology industry where one of the first things a Project Manager does while starting a project (besides reading a lot of material on this subject) is documenting an exhaustive Change Management process. This process is usually derived from the overall Quality Management policies and practices of the organization that have been perfected over years by executing hundreds of software development projects, which is in line with the best-practices of the industry, and has probably also been certified by some recognized international body.

Then where is the problem? Ask a Project Manager about how good is his/her Change Management. Nine out of ten times you will get the response that the impact of all the changes is under control. That exactly is the problem. There is too much focus on the impact of the changes rather than the changes.

Ask a customer instead about how they find the vendor's Change Management practice. Nine out of ten times you will get the response that they would be happier without it! They believe that these practices have made them lose the suppleness of bringing in market-driven needs as and when they want, to a good extent and have also introduced delays in that process. This aspect often gets misinterpreted as lack of customer's endorsement for the organization's Change Management policies (and also the wrong belief that the customer is not as "process-oriented" as we want them to be). Whereas, in reality the customer needs and believes in Change Management processes as much as the vendor wants it. What customer's don't want is the frequent misunderstanding and misuse of the Change Management practices that often end up defeating their main objective i.e. to enable them to bring about business changes with speed.

Customers want the Project Managers to break away from the "traditional" or "usual" ways of managing change and come up with something that is better aligned with the needs of today's business. They want something that can help them become - more competitive, better prepared to meet the challenges of globalization and quicker in responding to the market.

## What is going “wrong”?

Not many things are wrong with the Change Management processes and tools in use today. If your Change Management is not giving the intended results, probably there is something wrong with the way it is getting implemented. The reason it is not getting implemented in the right way is that the Project Manager perceives it in the wrong manner. Let us look at the key things that may be going “Wrong”.

### **Wrong #1: Focusing only on the impact of a change**

Change Management is not just about managing the impact of changes.

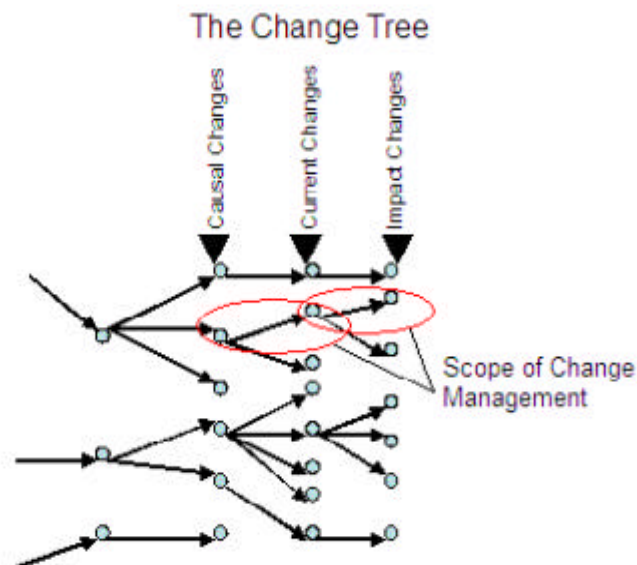
I have seen many Project Managers doing the following activities to manage a change:

- List the possible impact of the change
- Quantify the degree of the impact in various areas
- Identify possible measures to address the impact
- Mark change as “Acceptable” or “Not Acceptable” based on some pre-defined guidelines and thresholds

While this may be quite useful to address the impact of making a change, in a controlled manner, it does little to manage the change itself. The usefulness of the change, the driver of the change and the “impact of not making the change” gets completely ignored. In addition, the concept of “Acceptance” of a change based only on a few quantifiable parameters about its impact does not take an all-round view and hence it is faulty. E.g. A change that has an impact (e.g. cost, schedule) which is within acceptable limits may not be worth going for, because its usefulness is very low.

### **Wrong #2: Scope of Change Management limited to “Scope”**

This is an often-repeated mistake, particularly in the Information Technology industry. The view of Project Managers is limited to the changes to the project's Requirements/Scope. While changes to requirements are definitely important and need to be managed closely, the fact is that these changes are just the consequences of certain important changes elsewhere. To get the best results, it is these “master-changes”, which caused the changes in requirements, that need to be included in the scope of Change Management. In general, every change is the result of another change. Managing a change just by focusing on its impact normally takes care of the new changes to be created by the current change but one should also look at the change(s) that caused it for managing the current change itself.



Most Project Change Management processes today are designed to get triggered by changes in requirements. Changes to people, cost, risks, environment etc thus get missed out and are usually dealt with separately. As a result all other changes that follow are also left out.

E.g. A change in requirements can lead to change in people. If change in people is not managed within the boundaries of the same Change Management process, the consequent changes do not get handled properly.

### **Wrong #3: Believing that “Change is bad”**

Most Project Managers believe that the biggest problem a project can face is to have “too many changes”. Changing too often is considered “bad”. It probably reflects on his/her lack of ability of thinking ahead and planning in advance (or on the customer’s “lack of clarity” on what they want). Such a mindset leads to more effort being spent towards reduction and refusal of changes rather than control of changes.

### **Wrong #4: Too much of tool and process-centric Change Management**

This is the big Change Management “trap”. Managers fall into the trap of using various tools, templates and checklists designed for managing change and start looking at the tools themselves as the objectives of Change Management. Change-control tools, change-trackers, change-request forms, traceability-matrix, impact-analysis tools, change-acceptance criteria and many such similar tools and guidelines form the bulk of Change Management activities today. These excellent tools are apt for what they are supposed to do. However, they are only tools to achieve the objectives and when the tools themselves become the objective; the real objectives get out of reach.

### **Wrong #5: Being comfortable with the as-is situation**

A “smoothly-running” project is every Project Manager’s dream. A change, for them, is an aberration that requires extra attention and time. It is comfortable to deliver a project without any changes during execution.

I have seen Project Managers comparing every request from Customer, during the course of the project, against the original Requirements Document and heaving a sigh of relief if the request is not part of the defined scope. If it is a change, it can be refused!

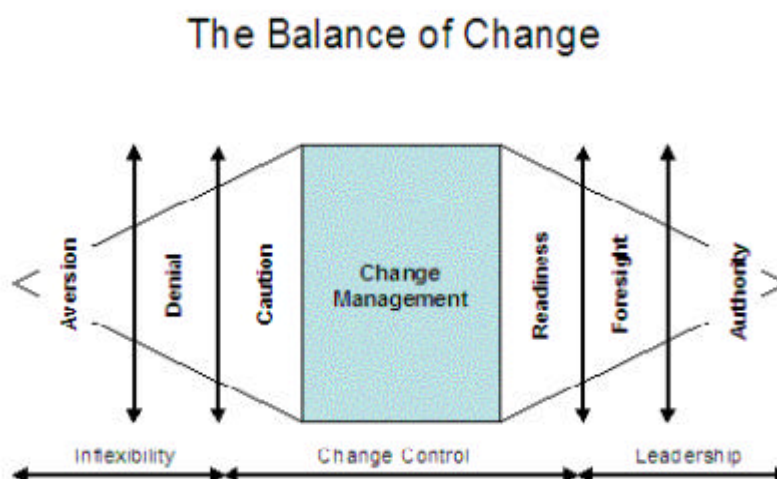
### **Wrong #6: Believing that Change means Cost**

Requirement Changes tend to get looked at with a sense of loathing because it is always associated with increased costs. This is not true. Most often the origin of a change is actually directed towards reduction of total costs (to the business) directly or indirectly, and the reduction outweighs the cost of implementing the change.

## **The Balance of Change**

The art of Change Management deals with the act of shifting the balance of the response to a change, from playing defensive to showing leadership. I have called this “The Balance of Change”.

Change control is primarily about being flexible and prepared enough to go for a positive change together with the required amount of analysis and caution. Things go wrong when caution, without the right analysis, leads to outright refusal and unwillingness. This situation is that of “**Change Denial**”. The situation can get further worse leading to complete lack of belief in change, which customer’s perceive as “**Change Aversion**”



## **What needs to be done?**

Do the wrong things right, and then get the following right things right too! Let us now look at the key things that need to be done “Right”.

### **Right #1: Start with an “Yes”**

While you may still be learning how to say “No” to your boss, start practicing saying “Yes” to a change! The first look at every change should be positive. The willingness to accept a change enables you to say a “No” to it more easily without being perceived as being averse to change. The positive frame of mind helps in a clean unbiased analysis and better judgment.

### **Right #2: Follow the process!**

Yes, follow your Change Management process. Know it well to avoid falling into the “trap” (Avoiding the process is not the solution). Change Management is complex and the processes and tools are important. Adhere to them but look at them as what they are i.e. they are just the processes to achieve the objective and not the objective itself.

### **Right #3: Go beyond the process! Be a Change Leader**

The biggest enemy of Change is Time. (What an irony considering that things change with time!). The challenge posed by a Change to a Project Manager is inversely proportional to the time available to manage it. Increase the time available by anticipating changes. This is “**Change Foresight**”. Do not wait for a change to happen. Try to predict it and be prepared. The “Change Tree” concept used to manage a change can also be used to predict the possible other changes because of that change. Try to be a step ahead of the change.

Sway and bend the causes of changes to bring the desired changes to effect. This is **Change Leadership**. While it is important to move from “Change Denial” towards leadership, accepting imposed changes without being convinced about them is not leadership. Lead your customers to help them make the right changes. Have your Change Management processes encompass the steps required to consciously foresee and influence changes.

### **Right #4: Evaluate long-term benefits**

Most systems take into account the impact of a change, particularly on the costs. Add to it the long-term benefits as well. A benefit of a positive change is likely to be seen either in the form of reduced cost in some stage of the life-cycle or increased business for someone. This is not easy to measure. Nevertheless, this aspect needs to be captured to get a good and complete view of the change.

Change is often associated with risk. It is a fact that a greater number of changes can amount to higher degree of risk but a change can also be initiated to reduce or eliminate an existing risk in the long run. While Change Management systems usually do a good job of quantitatively capturing impact on cost and schedule, the impact on risks gets

ignored. A good Change Management system is one that is well integrated with the Risk Management process or system.

#### **Right #5: Decide in a group**

Quantifiable parameters do help in taking a decision on changes but factors that cause a change or the factors created by a change are usually not as objective. A wrong change can lead to a series of other wrong changes. Taking the decision on a change amongst a group of people (stakeholders) along with the help of tools is usually more effective.

#### **Right #6: Learn from the past**

Learning from experience, Project Managers can move towards leading the changes instead of reacting to them. From the Change Tree, it is possible to find out the shortest route to achieve a desired Change that has happened in the past.

#### **Right #7: Remove “Number of Changes” and “Impact on schedule and cost” from all management reviews!**

This may sound like taking it too far but the fact remains that such practices in management reviews lead to anxiousness about the changes and this finally leads to aversion. Change definitely requires monitoring but reviews should rather look at the same data in terms of cause, benefits and risks instead of “numbers” and “impact”.

#### **Right # 8: If you’ve got to change, you’ve got to change!**

Knowing that a change is required and still not changing is blasphemy for a Project Manager. Delaying a required change increases the Impact Changes manifold (the “Change Reaction”) resulting in increased difficulty of managing the change and reduced chances of getting the benefits. The approach of “Let’s move on, we will see later” can work on some occasions but fails on most.

## The Change Management System

Make sure you have the most comprehensive Change Management process and system and then make sure it also covers the following aspects of every Change. The system should quantify these parameters (when possible), and help you to use them too to come to a decision.

Parameter	Description
Causal Change	The change in the Change Tree which is the most likely cause for this change
Type of Change	Risk, Scope, Cost, People, Law etc. (Scope is not the only type of change)
Expected business benefits	The key business drivers for the change and it's other long and short-term benefits
Foreseen	Yes or No (to evaluate effectiveness of Change Foresight)
Risks	Risks associated with implementing the change ( and not just the direct impact)
Costs saved	Direct or indirect costs saved (and not just the cost of implementing the Change)
Impact Changes	Changes predicted as a result of this change (along with probability ratings)
Impact of not making the Change	"What-if"; impact of not making the Change

## Conclusion

We ought to respect changes. The very reason one has a business on hand is because the customer wanted to make a change. As a result change needs to be managed, to get better results from the change and not to resist it. Modern non-practical theories on Change Management, certification-driven Quality Processes and a maze of Change Management related guidelines, templates, forms and checklists have made Project Managers often fall into the trap of Change Denial and customers perceive it as Change Aversion. This was not the intent of "Change Management". Good project management is not about identifying a "Change", analyzing the impact on cost and schedule and then refusing it! Good project management is about the ability to foresee possible changes faster than others; it is about using the skills required for controlling the impact and maximizing the benefits of a change and above all having the willingness to change. Getting everything right the first time is the best thing one can expect but the next best thing to do is to change at the right time. We (and our customers) do need Change Management; we need the right kind of Change Management that tilts towards leadership in the Balance of Change.

## References

None